

## Chord Progression

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/35633407) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35633407>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Dream SMP</a> , <a href="#">Dream SMP - Roleplay</a> , <a href="#">Minecraft (Video Game)</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Wilbur Soot &amp; TommyInnit</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot &amp; Technoblade</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot &amp; Phil Watson</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Wilbur Soot</a> , <a href="#">TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Family Bonding</a> , <a href="#">no romantic relationships</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Foster Family</a> , <a href="#">Adoption</a> , <a href="#">Physical Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Emotional/Psychological Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe</a> , <a href="#">Childhood Trauma</a> , <a href="#">Trauma Recovery</a> , <a href="#">Past Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Found Family</a> , <a href="#">Implied/Referenced Child Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Implied/Referenced Underage Drug Dealing</a> , <a href="#">Non-Biological Family</a> , <a href="#">Swearing</a> , <a href="#">Panic Attacks</a> , <a href="#">Sleep Deprivation</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Self-Doubt</a> , <a href="#">self-deprecating thoughts</a> , <a href="#">Feelings of Inadequacy</a> , <a href="#">sbi</a> , <a href="#">Anxiety</a> , <a href="#">Protective Sleepy Bois Inc</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot and Technoblade and TommyInnit are Siblings</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot and TommyInnit are Siblings</a> , <a href="#">Miscommunication</a> , <a href="#">Misunderstandings</a> , <a href="#">Starvation</a> , <a href="#">Fear of Abandonment</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot-centric</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot Close Third Person</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of <a href="#">Guitar Strings and Keyrings AU</a> , Part 5 of <a href="#">MCYT Fics</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">Anonymous</a>
Stats:	Published: 2021-12-13 Words: 8,403 Chapters: 1/1

# Chord Progression

by Anonymous

## Summary

Music has always been a comfort for Wilbur and in the strange new home he and Tommy have been relocated to, Wilbur finds that he needs his guitar now more than ever. (A collection of guitar moments from the main story from from Wilbur's pov).

~\*~

A companion story for Guitar Strings and Keyrings from Wilbur's pov set during chapters 2, 4, 8 and 10.

## Notes

Hello, I'm finally back!!

This took wayyy to long to finish but here we are!

Like the other Wilbur POV oneshots, this isn't a sequel and is instead a companion story for the main fic. It doesn't change anything about the main story and is more like bonus content :)

Please make sure to read thorough the tags for all fics in this series, there's a few themes that have the potential to be upsetting, so please stay safe while reading!!

This one feels a bit too disjointed tbh so I might go back and add little bits later on if inspiration hits but for now I'm sticking with this. Because it jumps around so much, this oneshot definitely relies on being familiar with the main fic, 'Guitar Strings and Keyrings are What it Takes to Build a Home', which can be found [here](#). You can also check out some of the Wilbur!POV fics which are in [this series](#)!

(I am writing with the characters from the Dream SMP, not the content creators behind them. This is entirely a work of fiction and does not reflect them in any way and only serves as my interpretation of their characters. Please don't share this with any ccs. If any one of them mentions that they are uncomfortable with fanworks of this nature I will delete it immediately.)

Sorry again for the wait between fics and hope you enjoy!! :D



Wilbur loved music.

To him it felt as like an obvious, irrefutable truth – the sky was blue, the Earth was made up of 71% water and Wilbur loved music.

Not that he really discovered how passionate he felt about it until he got his hands on a guitar.

Before that point, he had been delegated to striking the triangle in his primary school music class after every count of three. He wasn't outgoing enough to sing and sat at the back of the class, away from anyone would pay him any mind.

His social worker had told him that the people in this school would be nice. That all he needed to do was be brave and talk to them but Wilbur couldn't bring himself to actually take the leap. He would be gone in a few weeks anyway and saying goodbye hurt more when he cared about the people he was walking away from.

Despite being quiet, Wilbur usually did manage to find at least one friend at the various schools he attended.

He remembered joining halfway through a term and being excluded from almost every group of kids there, until one of the loudest kids in class had taken pity on him, asking Wilbur if he wanted to try selling the school pencils on the playground at lunchtime with him.

The boy proclaimed them best friends and Wilbur had laughed, had expected the novelty of his company to wear off by the second day but the boy smiled when he saw Wilbur at the school gate and ran over to meet him.

While his foster family didn't let him play out with the kid after school, Wilbur would look forward to weekdays where they would stick together, causing trouble and running away before their teachers could find them.

He remembered having fun and crying when he had to move on at the end of his placement.

At the time it felt as though his life was ending. Like he would cease to exist outside of that small town and all that would live on was his memory in the name 'Wilbur' written in sharpie on the tag of a polo shirt, passed down to whatever new foster kid came to stay in that house after him. They would attend his old school and replace him in the eyes of his one friend and before long Wilbur would be forgotten.

The thought hurt for a while but Wilbur had bigger issues to worry about as he hopped from house to house and at some point the faces began to blur together. It wasn't until years later, as he lay shivering on a hard spring mattress in the small attic room of yet another foster family, that he couldn't even remember the name of his old best friend.

That had been one of the last placements Wilbur had got before the system seemed to give up on him altogether – or at least it felt that way at the time.

He had been 11 years old when he first entered the group home and for all its faults, Wilbur was thankful to have some place he could expect to stay for a while. It felt like having solid ground beneath your feet after floating for so long, untethered and without an actual destination in mind.

But Wilbur quickly learnt that the cost of stability was caution and vigilance.

He was not the only child there to have had to wonder when his next meal was coming and so dinnertime became a warzone. Wilbur wanted to sympathise with the kids around him. They were just trying to eat while they still could in case they didn't get the opportunity to for a while, though it was hard to feel particularly sorry for them after days of going hungry himself. It didn't help that most of the kitchen cupboards were locked up. Wilbur was told it was for safety reasons. That some children had allergies and so couldn't just be left to take what they wanted. It made scavenging particularly difficult and it reached a point where kids began taking from each other.

Bedroom doors were not fitted with locks and so hiding personal items away from those with the intent to steal became a question of creativity, or how hard you could hit someone to deter them from rifling through your things.

Wilbur had never been much of a fighter but fortunately, he didn't have a lot to lose.

Until he set eyes on his first guitar.

It had been donated by a lady whose own children had left home, amongst a pile of toys and clothes but Wilbur had no interest in any of that.

He rescued the guitar from the hoard of children, all fighting to see what they could claim as their own, despite their caretaker's futile cries for them to "share!" and "play nice!"

Wilbur hugged the instrument to his chest and clambered up the stairs to the room he shared with some of the other boys. Mercifully, they rarely shut themselves away and it gave Wilbur the privacy he needed to look over his new treasure.

It was beautiful, chocolate-coloured dark wood, with a glossy, transparent varnish spread over its body that felt smooth underneath Wilbur's fingertips. Even the natural woodgrain could be seen, just barely visible when Wilbur held it up to the ceiling light.

It didn't take Wilbur long after that to learn how to play. He practiced every spare moment he could, pressing his fingers to the fretboard to figure out what sounds he could make and strumming over and over again until he felt callouses on the tips of his fingers.

He tried copying the actors in movies. Mirroring the way they moved their fingers and comparing the way his own work sounded to what came though the speaker of the group homes shared TV.

Wilbur lingered outside the music class at school to try and listen in on how the older kids, who brought their instruments in from home, were told to play.

He had even checked books out of the library to stare at the diagrams for hours on end and correct the positioning of his fingers and the timing in which he plucked at the strings. After some time, Wilbur could recognise some of the sheet music printed at the back of the book in the chapter on song writing.

It was the first real time Wilbur had thought about composition. Sure, he had been interested in guitar for some time but he had only been recreating sounds and songs.

While he had a basic understanding of how to read music, Wilbur preferred composing by ear – playing what felt natural and changing parts of his songs as he went.

They were amateur at best and Wilbur was just as embarrassed of them as he was proud but they were fun and therapeutic and for the first time in his life Wilbur felt passionate about something.

He'd practice his guitar every day and shove it under his bed at night, sure that it was out of sight and therefore safe.

Wilbur wasn't exactly friendly with the others in the group home but he had never strictly hated any of them. It appeared, however, that the sentiment was not returned.

His room was stormed by a group of kids. They grabbed him first and Wilbur struggled and fought their hands but he had never been particularly strong and was pinned down embarrassingly easily.

They had thrown open every draw and pulled the duvet from his bed, moving the wardrobe aside and peering behind it. They had found his guitar after no more than a few minutes of searching and promptly destroyed it in front of him, holding the ruined neck up for Wilbur to see before tossing it away as if it were little more than a broken toy and not the source of Wilbur's happiness for the past year.

Wilbur had never learned what he had done to provoke them – if he had taken the last slice of pizza at dinner, or insulted someone in passing, or been framed for another kid's misdemeanour.

He supposed it didn't really matter and let the issue rest after the social worker had sat them all down to apologise.

Weeks after it had happened, Wilbur would lay awake in bed at night, reliving the moment his guitar was brought down hard against the ground. The way it smashed and splintered, accompanied by a loud reverberating *bang*-

He woke with a start and turned his head, sobbing into his pillow quietly as to not wake the others he shared a room with. Wilbur would slip a hand out from under the covers and feel underneath his bed in the hopes that it had been a nightmare and for the realisation that his most precious possession was truly gone to hit all over again.

While Wilbur did still harbour an adoration for music, some nights he despised it. The itch he could feel in his fingers and the sudden, overwhelming need to feel his guitars neck in the

cushion of his palm. A gentle weight more comforting than it had any right being and without it, Wilbur was left with a terrible ache that didn't go away until he cried himself to sleep and woke the next morning feeling exhausted and hollow.

He had tried other things, small pebbles of a similar weight, pens he could fidget with during the day, even a Rubik's cube which he had hoped would keep his mind preoccupied enough to stop it from thinking about his lost guitar. But nothing else had been able to comfort him quite like strumming a repetitive tune and feeling the guitar hum in his lap.

Wilbur didn't like to think about the way he seemed attached to the instrument, like it was an extension of himself, but being without it felt as though he had to adapt to living with an amputated limb – the phantom sensation of a part of himself that was long gone.

Wilbur had spent countless hours berating himself over the way he clung to something that would leave such a gaping, aching hole in his heart should it ever disappear.

He thought it was an undeniably stupid notion – to knowingly love something that could be taken away from him without a moment's notice.

Wilbur resigned himself to being distant. To hold people and things at arm's length in case he should ever grow to love them in the same way.

And then he met Tommy...

~\*~

Wilbur felt his hands shake and he quickly clenched them into fists in his lap.

He was not scared. He was *not*. Tommy was asleep next door and Phil hadn't hurt them yet and even if he wanted to, Wilbur would be there to keep his little brother out of harm's way.

Wilbur gasped around a mouthful of air and felt his chest stutter as he breathed it out again. The room around him seemed distant and Wilbur reached a hand up to rub at his eyes. He looked around and found himself alone but unable to fight the uneasiness that came with being in a new place. He felt out of his depth, slowly sinking, like he was trying to keep from losing his grip of the present.

"Calm down," Wilbur hissed under his breath and bit back a whimper. "You're fine, you're *fine*, Tommy's-" Wilbur cut himself off with a whine and took another deep breath.

"Tommy's okay. Stop worrying, just *stop*."

Wilbur didn't calm down all at once.

He counted backwards from 100 and felt his heart slow down first, then when he reached 50 his hands relaxed and by the time he reached 0, Wilbur's vision didn't seem blurry anymore.

Though the initial panic had passed, Wilbur was left with a twisting, queasy sensation in his stomach and an overwhelming sense of exhaustion.

He curled up tighter as he sat on the floor with his back against the bedframe. Wilbur sighed and let his head fall back against the side of his mattress.

He should just try going to sleep but every time Wilbur closed his eyes, he found himself reliving first nights in other foster homes where he was hit or starved, or sent to his room to be forgotten about.

Besides, Wilbur didn't feel safe enough to turn off his bedside lamp and Phil hadn't stormed in to yell at him for wasting electricity, so Wilbur figured it was either okay, or the man didn't know – he knew it was likely the latter but could feign ignorance if his new foster father brought it up the next day.

Wilbur realised that the room he sat in was nicer than anything else he had been given in the past. It was spacious – second only to an attic room he'd been placed in when he was about 10 years old, but the cobwebs and the cold couldn't make up for the extra room – and was fitted with a desk, wardrobe and drawers, though Wilbur didn't have much to fill them with.

Decorations were sparse but Wilbur liked it that way. When rooms were filled with toys and patterned sheets and pictures, he felt as if he were taking another child's place – replacing them; something disposable that could be swapped out on a whim.

Wilbur's new bedroom was tidy and clean and though Wilbur could hear the howling wind outside, he only felt warm and cosy – tucked away from the elements.

It was with an overwhelming sense of dread, that Wilbur realised he found the place comforting.

He tried to push the feelings away quickly before he could think too deeply about them. Wilbur knew it was bad to grow attached to things – especially those that were not permanent. Those that could be taken away without so much as a warning.

Wilbur didn't even know if the house was safe – Techno and Phil had yet to show their true colours and Wilbur couldn't risk letting his guard down.

He felt nauseous, overwhelmed and tired but unable (and unwilling) to sleep. Wilbur sighed in resignation and hummed very quietly to himself.

He glanced to his bedroom door. It was ajar, ever so slightly cracked but the hallway was dark and Wilbur saw no movement outside. As much as he wanted to close it, and push the draws up against the handle, he couldn't bring himself to follow through with the idea. He was sure that enduring Phil's anger the next day just wouldn't be worth it. Besides, if Tommy needed him during the night, Wilbur wanted him to know he was always welcome to seek his brother out – especially in a place neither of them had been before.

He hesitated for a moment and listened in silence, for breathing, or footsteps, or the creaking of floorboards and even after he was sure that he was alone, Wilbur waited for the second



hand on his bedside clock to make another full rotation before he dared to move.

Wilbur slipped a hand under his bedframe and felt his fingers brush up against his black suitcase. He lingered there for a moment, breathing slowly and listening again for noise. When he heard nothing, he pulled the case from underneath his bed.

It wasn't an ideal hiding place and brought back more unpleasant memories than he cared to admit but as soon as he worked the zip open, Wilbur was hit with blissful relief.

Nestled amongst blankets and pillow cases Wilbur had stolen from various supply closets over the years, was his guitar.

Even under the dim light of the bedside lamp, it seemed to shine. Its wood a rich, golden colour and as Wilbur looked down at it, he saw his own reflection in its varnish.

He pulled the blankets and pillowcases out of the way and kicked them to the far side of the room. They were old and threadbare – the sort of thing of thing nobody would miss if it went missing. After all, Wilbur only needed them to protect his guitar from getting damaged as he moved it from house to house and once he had his instrument in his hands, he pushed the case out of the way too.

Guitar in-hand, Wilbur couldn't help but grin. He held it tightly, resting it on his lap and adjusting his grip so his fingers were in the right position to play.

Wilbur breathed in deeply, held it for a moment and then let his fingers move as he exhaled.

It was one chord – a singular harmony that rang pleasantly in Wilbur's ears and though he smiled to himself, he couldn't help but fear that the noise had been too much. In the silence of his room, it sounded way too loud and he cringed in on himself as if he expected to hear a door slam open and footsteps make their way down the hall to wrench his guitar from his hands.

Wilbur waited... and waited but nobody came and he allowed himself a sigh of relief.

With newfound confidence, Wilbur began to play again.

His fingers ghosted over the strings with practiced restraint, as he strummed very, very lightly and felt himself relax.

It had been so long since he had been able to so much as look at his guitar, let alone play anything. It was too risky in the group home. With so many children about, it was almost impossible to know where they were or if they were asleep and Wilbur was not prepared to take the risk.

And though he'd rather his guitar remain in one piece, he couldn't help but feel almost giddy at being able to hold it again, to feel it sing in his lap and look down at its bright, honey-coloured finish.

Wilbur smiled and his happiness in that moment was enough to suppress his apprehension of his new placement and the horrors he was sure would come with it.

Out of the corner of his eye, Wilbur saw something move in the dark of the hallway. He didn't look up but rolled his eyes fondly. He already knew it was Tommy.

The kid always was cautious whenever Wilbur was playing on his own. He had been ever since Wilbur had told him about what had happened to his first guitar and though Wilbur could never regret letting Tommy in, he figured it was why his brother was always so hesitant when it was in his hands.

Wilbur told him he was always welcome, of course. That Tommy would always be allowed to find him, no matter what.

Despite his insistence, Tommy still seemed to wait, as if unsure how to ask to join him. It seemed that tonight would be no different.

"You don't have to lurk outside, you know?"

Wilbur didn't look up from his guitar but even in his peripheral, he noticed that Tommy didn't move.

"We've been over this you can just come--"

He finally turned his attention to the door and his fingers clamped down over the strings in panic.

Instead of finding Tommy's blue eyes, Techno stared back at him.

Wilbur felt himself freeze, seized with an insurmountable sense of fear, which left him trembling and wide-eyed as he stared up at Techno, who loomed above him.

His heart hammered in his chest and Wilbur didn't register the way his grip tightened on the guitar in his lap, he only felt hard strings press against the skin on his fingers.

"Please," he said at last and his voice broke on the word. "Please don't--" Wilbur swallowed loudly, his attention unwavering on his foster brother who stood in his doorway. "I'll stop, okay? I promise, I'll do whatever you want just please don't take it. I'll never play again, I-I'm so sorry if I woke you up, I didn't mean to, I was trying to be quiet and you don't have to worry about me doing it again, really."

Techno just stared at him and Wilbur felt tears prick the corner of his eyes in fear and frustration but he blinked them away quickly. He wouldn't cry. He would *not*.

*Why was Techno just standing there?*

*Why wasn't he saying anything?*

Wilbur couldn't tell what Techno was thinking, which somehow made him seem even more dangerous.

"Please, I swear, I'll do anything, just don't tell Phil."

Wilbur knew how pathetic he must have looked. Shaking, on the verge of tears and begging with his body awkwardly bent over the body of his guitar protectively, but it was all he could do to hope Tommy's gift to him made it out of the situation unscathed.

"Phil?"

Wilbur flinched at the sound of his foster father's name. Techno wasn't talking loudly but in the quiet of Wilbur's room his voice sounded like a shout that echoed in Wilbur's ears and he whimpered, clutching his guitar tightly to his chest.

His head spun and Wilbur fought against the sick feeling in his stomach to try talking again.

"Please, let me make it up to you." It hurt to get the words out but Wilbur forced himself to continue. "What do you want?"

"Nothin'."

Wilbur resisted a growl of frustration. Of course, it was too much to ask for Techno to give him just a little bit of leeway.

Wilbur had been here before and as much as his stomach churned, he knew what he had to do. He'd resigned himself to it a long time ago, though that never made it any easier.

Wilbur knew how these things worked and he was sure that Techno wasn't new to ruining the lives of the kids Phil took in to foster either.

Wilbur just wished he would stop stalling. He was already tried and humiliated and completely exhausted. Nobody else was around. Techno could stop pretending like he wasn't thrilled to find Wilbur defenceless and clinging to the most perfect piece of blackmail he could have hoped for.

While Wilbur wasn't sure if Techno feigning ignorance was an intimidation tactic, it definitely served to fuel his mounting sense of panic and desperation.

"Is it money? I can pay you if you want!" Wilbur tried to remember what kids in other homes had asked of him. There had to be *something* he could get for Techno to buy his silence. "Or drugs, I can- if you want I'll get them-"

"You've got drugs?"

Wilbur shook his head quickly. "No but I can if that's what you want, I swear, all I need is time and I promise you-"

"Wait, no, I'm not into that sort of thing."

"Come *on*, Technoblade," Wilbur begged. "Don't make me guess."

"I don't want anythin'."

"Everybody wants something, please just let me do this, I have to do this."

Wilbur had to fight to keep his voice somewhat level. The last thing he wanted was Phil to hear them and wake up to find Wilbur hiding a guitar.

Phil hadn't relayed to him and Tommy what exactly the punishments were under his roof but Wilbur figured it wasn't anything he hadn't dealt with before. Foster parents didn't tend to be all that creative and Wilbur was sure that he'd seen it all. There wasn't a thing they could do to surprise him and whatever Phil threw at him, Wilbur was sure that he could endure it. If not for himself, then for Tommy.

"Oh my God," Wilbur caught the note of irritation that worked its way into Techno's voice. It was quiet and barely there at all but Wilbur heard it all the same. He instinctively straightened, braced himself and held still. "What is I *want* is for you to—"

Techno cut himself off and finally looked back down at him. Wilbur waited patiently, despite the rush of adrenaline that told him to *run, run, run—*

Wilbur took a breath and held it. He saw the tightness in Techno's jaw, the way his hands had curled into fists at his side and the irritation that twisted his face into a frown.

Wilbur knew exactly where this was going.

He tried to bury his fear, focused instead on how best to cover his guitar so it didn't get damaged when Techno's fists inevitably landed.

Admittedly, Wilbur told himself that sitting through a beating wasn't the worst way it could have gone.

The hard part would come the following day when he would have to lie to Phil about how he'd ended up with them and Tommy would look at him guiltily, as if he should have been there — as if Wilbur was someone worthy of crying over.

Then, Techno blinked and it was as if he was noticing Wilbur for the first time. He seemed to deflate and something like concern crossed his face.

They stared in silence for a moment and Wilbur barely dared to breathe until, at last, Techno cleared his throat.

"I'm going to bed," he said awkwardly. "It's late - you should too."

Before Wilbur could even process what he'd said, Techno turned and left his room without another word.

Wilbur remained clutching his guitar even after he heard Techno's door click shut, still reeling from how he had managed to escape the situation unharmed and with his guitar still in one piece.

When he finally managed to move, Wilbur crawled towards the discarded black case and lay his guitar down gently. He pulled the blankets and pillowcases around it with care, making sure that it was fully covered despite the way his hands shook.

He knew that nowhere in the room would be safe to hide it – not anymore with Techno knowing Wilbur had a guitar in the first place – but Wilbur still slid it under the bedframe anyway.

All he could do was hope that Techno took mercy on him and didn't tell Phil. Though he knew it was far from likely, Wilbur tried to believe it anyway.

He lay back on the bed, still terrified and unable to sleep but Wilbur couldn't bear to look at his own room anymore. He reached over and turned off the lamp at his bedside, plunging himself into darkness.

~\*~

Tommy had been irritable as soon as Wilbur found him after class at the end of the day.

The kid gave him no explanation, though it wasn't hard to guess that he likely had a difficult teacher in his last period.

While Wilbur loved his little brother more than anything, Tommy was a handful when he wasn't complaining every step they took and Wilbur found himself exhausted with the constant stress of looking over his shoulder to make sure they were both safe.

The walk to Phil's house from the bus stop should be the easier part of their journey home. After all, if they'd managed to avoid getting cornered on the bus, Wilbur considered them in the clear – sure, Techno had stood up for them once but there was no guarantee he'd do it again. Wilbur still couldn't figure out why he'd intervened in the first place.

Fortunately, Wilbur figured he and Tommy had plenty of practice at keeping their heads down and avoiding trouble. They hadn't been accosted after that first day but Wilbur knew better than to let his guard down.

“Why the fuck hasn't anyone put grit on the pavement yet? There's ice everywhere. It's going to snow soon if this weather can make up its mind for once.”

Wilbur shook himself from this thoughts and glanced over at Tommy. “You want to hold on to me?”

Tommy scowled as if Wilbur had insulted him. “No, fuck off, I'm not a kid,” Wilbur sighed and turned his attention back to Phil's house in the distance. “Stop treating me like- *shit!*”

Wilbur jolted as Tommy cried out and his body moved on autopilot. He threw an arm out in Tommy's direction to catch him before the kid could hit the ground but he missed and found himself looking down at Tommy. His brother lay there, sprawled out on the ground, grumbling to himself. Wilbur bit back a laugh and offered Tommy his hand to pull him up.

Tommy swatted it away. “Fuck *off*.”

Wilbur sighed and tried once more. He kept his voice light; placating. “*Tommy-*“

“Leave me alone.” Tommy ignored his brother’s hand and pushed himself up slowly. “Do something useful for once and open the door, I’m freezing.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes and shuffled up the rest of the driveway to the front door. He slipped a hand into his pocket and fished out the key. He held it tightly to avoid dropping it with his numb fingers as he slid it into the keyhole, still somewhat surprised to hear the lock click and door swing open when he pushed down on the handle.

Neither he nor Tommy had been given a key to the house they were staying at before and Wilbur couldn’t quite believe it.

When Phil had handed it to them, Wilbur expected it to be some awful joke. For Phil to snatch it back and laugh and tell them that if they weren’t back by curfew they’d be locked out in the cold.

But Phil had just stood there, somewhat awkward but with a smile that seemed too genuine for it all be part of an elaborate trick. Wilbur jolted at the realisation. A trick. Of course it was. Phil was testing him. He wanted Wilbur to hand it back – expected it of him, to see if Wilbur would be as presumptuous to think he could just come and go as he pleased.

Wilbur held it out to him without saying a word. He couldn’t – for some reason his throat felt tight but he refused to let it bother him.

“Oh, no, mate,” Phil said softly and shook his head. “You can hang onto that. It’s yours as long as you’re staying here. Sorry I only have the one spare, I’ll get another one cut for Tommy as soon as I can but for now just try to stick together or with Techno, yeah?”

Wilbur looked down at the key in his hand and closed his fingers around it.

“Why are you standing there?”

Wilbur spun around to find Tommy shivering behind him. The kid’s arms wrapped around himself and cheeks red from the chill in the air.

“I’m not,” he said and moved inside. “I was just waiting for you.”

Tommy kicked his shoes off at the door and threw his coat over the arm of the couch before gathering up the throw from the far end of the room and pulling it over his shoulders.

“You know, you should probably tidy your stuff before Phil gets home.”

Tommy groaned and turned away, bundled up on the sofa and sulking.

“Phil won’t be home for ages yet.”

Wilbur tried to be patient. He really did.

“Techno, then.”

“I’m not scared of Techno.”

“You should be.” Wilbur spoke before he could think the words through and before he knew it, Tommy had shook the blanket off to stare at him wide-eyed.

Tommy wasn’t a particularly hard person to read, especially since Wilbur had known him for so long, but there was something about the look on the kid’s face that Wilbur couldn’t place and it unsettled him more than he cared to admit.

“Sorry,” Wilbur said quickly but Tommy just pushed himself off the couch, almost robotic in the way he moved.

“I’ll go... move the shoes.”

Tommy grabbed his coat from the arm of the couch. It had been Wilbur’s at one point but after being convinced to take it, Tommy seemed somewhat attached.

Tommy had only stepped out into the hallway but alone in the living room, Wilbur felt some awful, terrible sense of loneliness and had to force himself to not follow Tommy out of the room.

After some quiet shuffling, Tommy retuned and sat down on the couch beside his brother. Wilbur passed him the throw and Tommy burrowed into it once again.

Tommy said nothing and Wilbur heard the silence impossibly loud in his ears.

“I’m sorry,” Wilbur repeated and hoped Tommy didn’t catch the note of desperation that worked its way into his words.

“No,” Tommy said at last and shook his head. “It’s- I-“ he cut himself off and groaned while pressing the heel of his palm to his eyes in frustration. “It’s not you. I had a shit day but that doesn’t mean I can be a dick to you. I, um, sorry.”

“It’s alright.”

There was a moment of silence where Wilbur noticed Tommy’s brows knit together and he seemed to think to himself. Then, before Wilbur had time to process what was happening, Tommy spun around to look him in the eye, something hard and unwavering that demanded Wilbur’s undivided attention.

“Has Techno been fucking with you?”

“No.” It felt like a lie, though Wilbur wasn’t sure why. Techno hadn’t really given him any trouble. Not yet, anyway.

“You can tell me if he has, you know. I’ll beat the shit out of him.”

Wilbur huffed a laugh. “Sure you will.”

It wasn't at all uncommon for Tommy to become protective over his brother when he suspected he was being threatened and Wilbur found it as endearing as it was concerning.

The last thing he'd want was for Tommy to involve himself with Wilbur's issues. Wilbur would handle it like he always had and keep his little brother at arm's length from any sort of danger, no matter what.

"I mean it," Tommy insisted, though bundled up under a blanket, he looked younger and Wilbur knew there wasn't any real bite behind his words, even if the kid seemed convinced otherwise.

"Of course." Tommy frowned and Wilbur stood before he could argue. "Stay there, I'll be back."

"Where are you going?"

Tommy shuffled to the edge of the couch and leaned forward to try and catch a glimpse of Wilbur as he darted up the stairs.

"I'll be back," Wilbur called down to him and his voice echoed through the hallway. It was louder than they'd dared to be since moving in to Phil's house but nobody was home and Wilbur found the awkward silences to be almost unbearable.

He was back at Tommy's side in under a minute, hand closed around the neck of his honey-coloured guitar as he threw himself back onto the couch, smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Tommy shifted and glanced down, he didn't let himself smile even as he stared intent as Wilbur's fingers moved along the strings into position and he started strumming.

Before Wilbur had begun humming along, Tommy was drumming on his leg to tune. He seemed more at ease already.

"C'mon," Wilbur didn't stop playing as he grinned over at Tommy. "You know the words."

Tommy shook his head quickly. "I really don't."

"You do," Wilbur couldn't keep the teasing lilt out of his voice. "I introduced you to this band."

Tommy sighed dramatically and though his words dripped with sarcasm, he returned Wilbur's smile tenfold. "Thanks for that."

"You're welcome. I'm always happy to be the reason your taste in music isn't awful."

Tommy rolled his eyes as he settled against the plush back of the couch and took in a deep breath. When he exhaled it was with a quiet rush of words as he began to sing, uncertain at first, then quickly gaining confidence.



There was something about Tommy losing the nervous edge to his voice that sabotaged his ability to keep in tune, though he seemed loud and unashamedly happy and Wilbur wouldn't have it any other way.

He didn't even protest as Tommy pulled him up and onto his feet while he danced about the living room, as Wilbur played song after song – some Tommy knew and some Tommy pretended to know so he'd seem as cool as his older brother.

Wilbur didn't know how long he'd been playing. The ache in his fingers from holding strings to the fretboard had passed and while he was tired and out of breath, for the first time in a long while he and Tommy were happy.

He wanted more than anything for the moment to last. Just a little bit longer. Just one more song. Tommy didn't show signs of slowing down and so Wilbur continued to strum and sing, but then, like a switch had been flipped, Tommy stilled.

Wilbur noticed the way he clamped his mouth shut and stared out into the hallway, his body tense as if resisting the urge to bolt. Then, Wilbur looked past him and noticed Techno staring back at them.

Wilbur felt despair crash down on top of him like a wave, sudden and with enough force to knock him off his feet but he locked his knees before his legs could buckle underneath him.

Why now? Of all times for Techno to show up, it had to be when they were shouting at the top of their lungs and Wilbur was playing his guitar and Techno would definitely take it from him now and despite the inevitability of it, Wilbur couldn't manage to keep the fear at bay.

“I- I can explain!”

He really couldn't. There wasn't any way to justify it that wouldn't piss Techno off even more.

Tommy spun around to look at his brother and noticed the way his hands trembled as he held on to his guitar. Wilbur really wished the tightness of his jaw and the wetness in his eyes wasn't quite so obvious.

Though despite everything, Wilbur knew that the whole situation was completely futile. He'd lose his guitar again. He'd have to watch it be destroyed in front of him and this time Tommy would be there and Wilbur didn't know if he'd even be able to-

“Look, I mean, it wasn't the worst thing in the world...” Wilbur's head snapped up and though his vision was unclear he tried desperately to keep his focus on Techno as he spoke. “It's actually kind of good. Not that I thought you'd be bad! But if you wanted to play your guitar downstairs sometimes I, uh, I wouldn't be against it - if you wanted to.”

Wilbur wasn't quite sure what he'd heard. The words didn't make sense on their own and he resolved that Techno had to be mocking him. His voice was naturally level, so it was likely just an insult delivered in a tone slightly more dry than Wilbur was used to.

Was Techno daring him to play again? To really test his patience before he snaps and Wilbur loses his guitar for good?

It seemed the most likely but Techno appeared alarmingly earnest in the way he looked over to them. He stumbled over words and glanced between them awkwardly as if he wasn't quite sure where his attention should be – as if he'd interrupted Wilbur and Tommy despite them living in *his* house.

“Wil,” Tommy whispered, shaky but determined in a voice so quiet Wilbur barely heard it at all. “You should hide.”

Wilbur felt his heart stop inside his chest.

No.

*Never.*

He knew exactly what Tommy was implying and the words left Wilbur feeling sick. He'd sooner die than let his younger brother get hurt to protect him. If he had to carry Tommy to safety himself, then he'd do it – *anything* to keep him out of harm's way.

Before he could get the protest out, Techno spoke again and Wilbur jolted to pay attention.

“Okay then, that's... that's great. I guess I'll just go now. Leave you both to it then.”

There was a beat of silence before Techno just turned and walked away, ending everything so fast it sent Wilbur reeling.

There wasn't any shouting, or threats, or thrown punches. Techno really had just left them alone and Wilbur couldn't quite believe it.

“Well,” Tommy said at last and closed his hands into fists to keep them from shaking. “That was fucking weird.”

Wilbur couldn't agree more.

~\*~

“Do you want to tell me why you're being all quiet and stuff?”

Wilbur looked up from his guitar, though his fingers did not stop strumming. He found Tommy shuffling into his room, determined but hesitant, as if he wasn't quite sure how to proceed and as much as Wilbur wanted to pretend that he was alright, he knew that Tommy wouldn't believe him. Besides, he hated keeping things from the kid.

“I heard them talking.”

Tommy made his way over slowly, as if Wilbur would bolt – as if he had anywhere to go – and crawled onto the bed to sit beside his brother with his back against the wall and legs tucked up against his chest.

He sat there a moment and hesitated before asking, “Who?”

“Techno and Phil.”

“Okay...” Tommy paused and waited for Wilbur to elaborate, then upon realising he didn’t intend to continue, pressed the matter further. “Are you going to tell me what they were talking about?” He said nothing. “Wil?”

“Us,” Wilbur spat the word out, as if it tasted bitter on his tongue and then as soon as his voice was out there, he couldn’t seem to stop the rest coming in a rush of breath. “Well, you mostly, I think, but it was implied that I’d be going too.”

“Going where?”

Wilbur’s fingers moved quicker as he played and he became less involved with staying in time than just getting the song out, as if finishing it would help him overcome the nauseous churning sensation in his stomach faster.

“I don’t know how long this placement lasts,” Wilbur said without looking up at Tommy. “They didn’t tell me. It’s been so long since I’ve reached the end of a placement without being sent back early.”

“They’re sending us back?”

Wilbur heard Tommy’s voice break as he spoke. The fragile tremor that started at the back of his throat and cut through the words. Wilbur didn’t have to meet his eyes to know they’d be wet with unshed tears, or to see his chest stutter as he tried in vain to keep his breathing level.

“We were never staying in the first place.”

Wilbur didn’t know why he was surprised, he and Tommy had never been a permanent part of anyone’s lives except each other’s. Though he couldn’t help but fight to restrain the overwhelming sense of bitterness he felt – that the whole thing wasn’t fair.

And as much as he tried to think maturely about the situation. Wilbur knew that he and Tommy were never meant to stay for long to begin with.

Techno and Phil had done more for them than anyone else and it was ungrateful to acknowledge that fact and still want more. But despite knowing deep down that Phil handing them back wasn’t actually a betrayal at all, Wilbur still felt bitter and devastated and completely heartbroken.

Most annoyingly of all, he was well aware that he had no right to be angry.

Phil and Techno had put up with them for 3 months already. They had dealt with him and Tommy despite all the problems that came with them and didn’t send them back early, even

though Wilbur had no idea why.

*Because they care about you as much as you care about them.*

Wilbur pushed the thought from his mind immediately. Getting sentimental wouldn't help, it would only make things worse when they inevitably did have to pack their bags. Actually, Wilbur figured they should probably get started on that sooner, rather than later.

"But I don't want to go back."

"Me neither."

"What-" Tommy's voice broke. "What do we do?" He was breathing through his mouth, loud gasping breaths that shook his shoulders.

Wilbur let out a sigh, his head falling back against the wall of his bedroom as he shrugged.

"Enjoy it, I guess."

~\*~

*Okay, Wilbur breathed deeply. He could do this. He wanted to do this.*

Wilbur blinked up and saw three pairs of eyes staring back at him and quickly looked down at his fingers again. They shook slightly and he gripped the neck of his guitar tighter.

He wasn't scared. That would be ridiculous.

Wilbur plucked a string and the sound rang out around the living room. Phil, Techno and Tommy were patiently waiting for him and while he knew they were likely just staying silent to give him enough time to work up the nerve to actually begin, Wilbur couldn't help but wish they would talk, or turn the TV on or *something* to take the focus off of him for just a moment.

He wasn't ready.

He wasn't ready but he really, *really* wanted to be.

It was supposed to be easy, he'd played in front of Tommy before. Playing in front of Phil and Techno should feel no different but Wilbur couldn't find it in himself to commit to a melody and stalled by twisting one of the tuning pegs and plucking again.

He couldn't remember a time where he'd struggled this much when he'd first met his brother but he knew there had to have been one. Tense pauses where he'd fiddle with the strings and quickly cast his eyes up to make sure that the kid wasn't about to spring forward and wrench the guitar from his hands – the guitar he'd bought no less. Wilbur couldn't pinpoint the shift,

the moment that instinctive fear faded and he went from strumming to singing and then composing in front of Tommy.

He breathed in a deep breath, shaky and gasping and quiet, held it for a moment and exhaled in a rush. It was a pitiful attempt to calm his racing heart and Wilbur forced himself to move, to arrange his fingers over the strings and press down hard. He felt the signature bite of metal as against his skin, the little pinch he had grown used to after years of practice but found himself unable to bring his other hand down to actually strum.

He was too tense. His muscles stiff and Wilbur knew that even if he managed to force out his first chord, he wouldn't be able to move quick enough to get the next out in time to actually give his family a song.

And he really did want to give them a song – something special after everything they had done for him.

For Tommy for staying by his side for years, his little brother who he cherished more than anything, for Phil, the father figure Wilbur had long since given up hope of finding and for Techno, the sibling he never knew he needed.

No, it *needed* to be good. The best performance he could give and Wilbur had no idea where to even begin.

“You okay?”

Wilbur blinked and looked down to where Techno was sat on the floor, his legs tucked up to his chest and head resting back against the couch.

“Yeah,” Wilbur replied at last and if Techno could hear the hesitance in his voice, he didn't comment on it.

“You don't have to if you don't want to,” Techno said and he sounded gentle. He spoke quietly but loud enough for Wilbur to hear from his place on the couch. “Tommy's still pretty sold on watching Up so we could always do this some other time.”

Wilbur laughed softly and smiled down at his brother.

It felt like a weight had been lifted and Wilbur found it easier to breathe again, his shoulders relaxing as he shifted the guitar in his lap.

Of course, Wilbur knew that Techno and Phil wouldn't force him into anything he wasn't comfortable with but hearing it again was more of a relief than he realised.

He had the option to back out. He always had the option to back out and everything would be *fine*. He wouldn't be hit, or starved, or berated and that fact still felt like something of a dream, like Wilbur would wake up and reach for his guitar and it would be gone again and he'd realise he was staring at the ceiling of the group home.

He took in the room around him and basked in that new feeling of comfort. The warm fuzzy feeling of being home that Wilbur found that he could definitely get used to.

“Nah, it’s okay.”

“If you’re sure.”

With newfound confidence, Wilbur answered him. “I am.”

He took a breath once again and this time it felt easier to let it go. As his chest fell, Wilbur let his fingers sweep over the strings and before he could even think, he’d repositioned his left hand on the fretboard and strummed again.

The rest of the song came easy after that and left Wilbur feeling light and happy in a way that made him wonder why he was so scared in the first place.

It was far from his best performance. There were a few occasions where his fingers slipped, or he played the wrong chord, or when he finally dared to open his mouth and sing the words came out in a quiet murmur before he finally relaxed into the rhythm of the song itself.

But despite Wilbur’s little mistakes, when he finally finished and looked up, he was met with gentle praises from Phil and a smile so sincere that Wilbur knew that none of them mattered – that he would be loved, imperfections and all. It was never about what song Wilbur played, or how well he played it. That tentative trust was the part that kept him grounded – it allowed him to step outside his comfort zone and then guide him back to the first and only place he felt truly safe. To the little family he loved.

Then, when Wilbur finally set his guitar aside and looked out over his family, he heard their voices, the way they shouted over each other and laughed and joked. It sounded melodious, comforting and for the first time in his life, Wilbur felt his hands relax in his lap, fingers uncurling and still, without the urge to reach for the familiar wooden neck and strings he had sought comfort in for so long.

He was happy. Completely at home with his new family that somehow felt old.

Something from within his heart had begun to sing.

And Wilbur had always loved music.

## End Notes

Here's my [Tumblr](#) if you ever wanna say hi and my [trello](#) for progress updates on all of my fics :D

Lastly, here's the WIP list for upcoming Guitar Strings Wilbur!POV fics people have requested over on Tumblr:

- Meeting Techno and Phil + car ride home
- Gapple scene
- Guitar Strings and Keyrings epilogue (Techno's pov)

Thank you all so much for reading and following this series, your support means the world to me as always <33

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!